

Message Text

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TAGS: ECON, EAID, BG

SUBJECT: FOOD SITUATION IN BANGLADESH: WASHINGTON POST
EDITORIAL

ROME FORFODAG

1. THE FOLLOWING EDITORIAL APPEARED IN WASHINGTON POST,
MAY 13, 1973 UNDER TITLE " GRAIN CRISIS IN BANGLADESH"
(UNNECESSARY WORDS OMITTED).

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2. BEGIN QUOTE: IN BANGLADESH THE SITUATION IS ALMOST BEYOND BELIEF. THIS DESPERATELY POOR AND HUNGRY COUNTRY OF 80 MILLION PEOPLE CAUGHT WORLD'S SYMPATHY, OR FANCY, WHEN IT BECAME A NATION LATE IN 1971. ON THIS BASIS, IT WAS OFFERED FREE SOME 2.5 MILLION TONS OF FOOD GRAINS IN 1972 - NEARLY HALF FROM INDIA, MOST OF REST FROM UNITED STATES. BUT POLITICAL STYLES CHANGE. IN 1972 SOVIET UNION DECIDED TO BUY SOME 18 MILLION TONS OF FOOD AND FEED GRAINS IN THIS COUNTRY. BANGLADESH DID NOT DISAPPEAR AS A CAUSE OVERNIGHT: FOOD COMMITMENTS MADE EARLIER REMAINED IN EFFECT. BUT SOVIET DEAL, LAUDED FOR ITS CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE AND AMERICAN BALANCE OF PAYMENTS AND PRESIDENT'S RE-ELECTION, TOOK CENTER STAGE.

3. THE RESULTS, FOR BANGLADESH, HAVE BEEN AWESOME. GRANT AID OF AMERICAN FOOD HALTING, TO BE REPLACED BY SALES.

THE REASON IS, ONE OFFICIAL PUTS IT, GRANT AID WAS GIVEN ON AN EMERGENCY BASIS AND "BY DEFINITION AN EMERGENCY IS SOMETHING SHORT-LIVED." BY AMERICAN DEFINITION, ONE SHOULD ADD. SO BANGLADESH, WHOSE FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES HOVER BARELY AT \$200 MILLION MARK, HAS BEEN FORCED TO GO OUT AND BUY SOME \$120 MILLION WORTH OF FOOD- AT PRICES KITED BY SOVIET WHEAT DEAL, NEEDLESS TO SAY. EVEN WITH CASH, GRAINS ARE NOT AVAILABLE, OR NOT AVAILABLE IN THE AMOUNTS AND ON THE DELIVERY SCHEDULES NECESSARY. BANGLADESH NEEDS MONTHLY IMPORTS OF ABOUT 300,000 TONS TO KEEP EVEN. BUT NOW THAT SO MANY GRAIN SHIPS HAVE BEEN DIVERTED FROM Dacca TO ODESSA, DELIVERIES HAVE FALLEN TO 50,000 TONS- THIS AT YEAR'S MOST CRITICAL BETWEEN HARVESTS TIME. AND, OF COURSE, SHIPPERS HAVE RAISED THEIR PRICES. ONE SHOULD NOTE THAT CONSUMPTION NORM ON WHICH THESE CALCULATIONS ARE BASED IS A MERE 15 OUNCES OF FOOD GRAINS PER PERSON PER DAY, A LEVEL CERTAIN TO GUARANTEE A DEGREE OF NATIONAL MALNUTRITION- MALNUTRITION IS ITSELF A HORRIBLE WASTING DISEASE. ABOUT SIX TIMES AS MUCH GRAIN PER PERSON GOES INTO AMERICAN DIET, IT MIGHT BE NOTED.

4. WHAT SHOULD BE DONE? IMMEDIATELY, AMERICAN AND SOVIET GOVERNMENTS SHOULD TAKE ALL NECESSARY STEPS TO LET AVAILABLE SHIPPING BE USED TO CARRY AVAILABLE FOOD TO UNCLASSIFIED

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DESPERATE BANGLADESH. THE SEEMING SOVIET- AMERICAN CONSPIRACY OF SELFISHNESS IN THIS MATTER SHOULD BE DISSOLVED FOR SAKE OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE POISED ON BRINK OF WASTING AND DEATH. TIME IS SO SHORT THAT THIS SHOULD BE DONE BEFORE SCHEDULED BREZHNEV- NIXON SUMMIT; THEY COULD BOTH MAKE POLITICAL CAPITAL OUT OF IT. REGARDLESS OF WHETHER SUMMIT DERAILED OR DELAYED BY WATERGATE, THE

TWO POWERS SHOULD ADDRESS THEMSELVES TO PROBLEM: PROBLEM NOT ONLY OF BANGLADESH BUT OF ALL HUNGRY NATIONS OF WORLD.

5. SECONDLY, IT VITAL AT THIS MOMENT OF GRAVE CRISIS IN BANGLADESH THAT UNITED STATES, WITH OR WITHOUT COOPERATION OF OTHER MAJOR FOOD PRODUCERS, SPARE BANGLADESH THE NEED TO DIVERT ITS GROTESQUELY SMALL RESERVES OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE TO PURCHASE OF EITHER FOOD OR SHIPPING TO CARRY FOOD. THE INTENDED AMERICAN DECISION TO END GRANT AID AND TO SELL GRAIN- AT EASY TERMS BUT UNDER A PROGRAM REQUIRING BANGLADESH TO PAY EXPENSIVE SHIPPING COSTS- IS SIMPLY WRONG. THIS IS FORM OF HARDHEADEDNESS ENTIRELY OUT OF PHASE WITH BANGLADESH' S PLIGHT. UNITED STATES SHOULD KEEP UP INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE TO DEAL WITH IT, EVEN THOUGH THE BENGALI CAUSE NO LONGER HAS " GLAMOR" OR EXCITEMENT THAT SUSTAINED IT ABROAD YEAR OR SO AGO.

6. FINALLY, THIS PARTICULAR CRISIS SHOULD SPUR THOSE IN AND OUT OF GOVERNMENT WHO UNDERSTAND THAT FOOD PRODUCTION MUST BE PLANNED MUCH MORE ON INTERNATIONAL BASIS WITH EYE TO FILLING ALL INTERNATIONAL NEEDS. SHORT- TERM SINGLE- COUNTRY AGRICULTURAL PLANNING IS ANACHRONISM AND LUXURY OF RICH AND, AS CONDITION OF BANGLADESH DEMONSTRATES, A MORAL OUTRAGE. A PRESIDENT LOOKING FOR WORTHY NEW HORIZONS TO CONQUER IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS CAN START RIGHT HERE. END QUOTE.

7. PRESS GUIDANCE FOLLOWS SEPTTEL. RUSH

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